

AMENDMENTS TO THE SPECIFICATION:

Please amend the paragraph beginning at page 18, line ³~~8~~ as follows:

Since the first cholecystectomy in 1882, the procedure has become widespread with over 500,000 performed annually in the United States alone. The safety of this procedure has improved with the overall mortality rate decreasing from 6.6.% in 1932 to 1.8% in 1952 and 0.17% in 1989 with a general complication rate around 4.4 - 4.9%. A major disadvantage of this procedure is the need for a relatively large incision of skin, subcutaneous-~~flat~~ fat tissue, and abdominal wall muscles leading to prolonged healing of the postoperative wound with significant pain and disability. Furthermore, large incisions are associated with an increased risk of infection and development of postoperative hernias.